

- While there is no explicit scriptural text that states that Mary was immaculately conceived in the womb of her mother and our patroness, St. Ann, there are key verses in Sacred Scripture that point to the truth of this reality.
- In Genesis 3:15, which tells us of the aftermath of Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden, our Lord says to the serpent: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers."
- This woman mentioned by our Lord has always been understood by the Church to be Mary, the Mother of God, which is why Catholic art depicting the Blessed Virgin Mary often shows her with her foot upon the head of the serpent, just as in our painting in the chapel.
- Whereas Eve had given herself to the serpent, and thereby had subjected herself and all of her offspring to the death of original sin, Mary – the New Eve – reversed this relationship.
- Unlike the first Eve, Mary was never subject to the power of the evil one – nor could she be if she were to fulfill her role in salvation history. In order to give birth to the New Adam, Mary had to be free of all stain of sin from the first moment of her conception.
- This is a truth that is implicitly affirmed in Luke 1:28 when the archangel Gabriel greets Mary at the Annunciation and refers to her as "full of grace." The literal translation of the Greek text is "you who have already been graced."
- St. Luke's usage of "full of grace" describes a reality about Mary, viz., that she had, from a time well before the Annunciation, been blessed with a fullness of God's own grace life – indeed from the very first moment of her conception.
- And it is this mystery, that Mary was *immaculately* conceived, that we celebrate today.
- As Mary has the unique and august role of being the Mother of God, her all-holiness from the first moment of her conception, is perfectly fitting.
- Because Mary was immaculately conceived and remained absolutely sinless throughout the entire course of her earthly life, Mary is able to carry out her role as the New Eve, the counterpart of the New Adam: Jesus Christ.
- And we should be grateful for this! For without Mary's acceptance of the task of divine maternity and her perseverance in remaining free from sin, we would not have Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer.
- Over the centuries some theologians have objected to the dogma of the Immaculate Conception for fear that believing Mary to be free from sin would mitigate her need to be redeemed by Christ, and thereby detract from the power of His redemptive acts.
- But through the intellectual work of Duns Scotus, a Franciscan scholar of the High Middle Ages, we learn that even though sinless, Mary was still in need of redemption. For no man, not even the fairest honor of our race, is capable of saving himself.
- But Christ's redemption of Mary, which occurred at the moment of her conception when she was preserved free from original sin, was a more excellent form of redemption than what the rest of humanity enjoys.
- Whereas we sinners are redeemed by being *liberated* from sin, Mary was redeemed by being *preserved* from sin at the moment of her conception.
- St. John Paul II expanded on this by stating that, the glory of God's grace is perfectly manifested in Mary because she has been redeemed in a more sublime manner by being

preserved from original sin by the redemptive merits of her Son – and this is most fitting for the Mother of God.

- It is Mary's divine maternity that gives rise to this beautiful mystery of her immaculate conception and makes her the most beautiful element of all of God's creation.
- Indeed, while Mary is a member of our poor and weak human race, her entire person is permeated by a greatness and beauty that stems from the glory of grace given to her at her conception (cf. *Redemptoris Mater*).
- But this beauty is not for her own glory, and the singular grace she has received is not for her alone. Rather, she was made full of grace for our salvation!
- By being the Mother of Jesus, the Word-Made-Flesh, Mary was placed at the center of that enmity that exists between Christ and the serpent that is mentioned in Genesis 3:15. And it is there in the center of that enmity that she battles for our souls and leads us to her Son.
- Furthermore, this greatness and beauty that she possesses is not a privilege that separates her from us.
- To the contrary, this singular grace of being immaculately conceived enables Mary to be the Mother of God and His associate in crushing the head of Satan, so that we might be liberated from his wickedness and snares, and one day participate in that state of blessedness she already enjoys in Heaven.
- It is for this very reason, my brothers and sisters, that every year on this feast, I consecrate our entire parish to Mary's Immaculate Heart, and have been doing so for 11 years now!
- When we consecrate ourselves to her, she takes us to herself as her very own children, and like a good mother, she wraps her mantle around us and works to protect us from all that might harm us.
- Thus, with joy in our hearts and a firm and unwavering faith, let us entrust ourselves wholeheartedly to our Lord's Immaculate Mother. May she who is both ever virginal and ever sinless, keep us within her maternal care.
- Immaculate Heart of Mary, Cause of our Joy, pray for us!

*O Most Blessed Mother, heart of love, heart of mercy, ever listening, caring, consoling, hear our prayer. As your children, we implore your intercession with Jesus your Son. Receive with understanding and compassion the petitions we place before you today, especially that our parish may be consecrated to your Immaculate Heart. We are comforted in knowing your heart is ever open to those who ask for your prayer. We trust to your gentle care and intercession, those whom we love and who are sick or lonely or hurting. Help all of us, Holy Mother, to bear our burdens in this life until we may share eternal life and peace with God forever. Amen.*